

# Life after God

**FINDING FAITH WHEN YOU  
CAN'T BELIEVE ANYMORE**

Mark Feldmeir



**DOWNLOADABLE  
SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE**  
*with Video Intros from the Author*

## **SPECIAL DISCOUNTS AVAILABLE**

Most Westminster John Knox Press books are available at special quantity discounts when purchased in bulk by corporations, organizations, and special-interest groups.

For more information, please email  
[SpecialSales@wjkbooks.com](mailto:SpecialSales@wjkbooks.com).

**WJK** WESTMINSTER  
JOHN KNOX PRESS  
LOUISVILLE • KENTUCKY

© 2023 Mark Feldmeir

*First edition*

Published by Westminster John Knox Press  
Louisville, Kentucky

23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32—10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*All rights reserved.* No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. For information, address Westminster John Knox Press, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396. Or contact us online at [www.wjkbooks.com](http://www.wjkbooks.com).

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition, copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

*Book design by Allison Taylor  
Cover design by designpointinc.com*

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Feldmeir, Mark, author.

Title: Life after God : finding faith when you can't believe anymore / Mark Feldmeir.

Description: First edition. | Louisville, Kentucky : Westminster John Knox Press, [2023] | Summary: "Offers an introduction to a God that many people weren't aware existed—a mysterious, uncontainable, still-active God who loves and cares for real people with real problems"— Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2023013745 (print) | LCCN 2023013746 (ebook) | ISBN 9780664268404 (paperback) | ISBN 9781646983353 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Faith. | Trust in God--Christianity.

Classification: LCC BV4637 .F37 2023 (print) | LCC BV4637 (ebook) | DDC 234/.23--dc23/eng/20230530

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2023013745>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2023013746>

Most Westminster John Knox Press books are available at special quantity discounts when purchased in bulk by corporations, organizations, and special-interest groups.

For more information, please e-mail [SpecialSales@wjkbooks.com](mailto:SpecialSales@wjkbooks.com).

## CHAPTER 1

### “shh” the problem of god



#### WATCH THE CHAPTER 1 COMPANION VIDEO

<http://bit.ly/482ZgkO>

1. The author begins with the story of his professor’s hypothetical question about God stopping a fired bullet. Do you find yourself challenged by questions of *theodicy*, or why an all-loving and all-powerful God does not stop bad things from happening? Do you consider this a problem that must be solved?
2. What do you think of Pascal’s wager that it is safer or wiser to believe in God than to risk eternal punishment? Do you agree with Pascal that “reason impels you to believe”?
3. How might the opposite—“reason impedes your ability to believe”—be true instead?
4. Have you heard the “shhh” the author discusses—the implicit or explicit warning not to ask the hard questions about God? What questions seem most threatening to some people?
5. How would you describe “the God you no longer believe in”?

## CHAPTER 2

“psst” the call of god



### WATCH THE CHAPTER 2 COMPANION VIDEO

<http://bit.ly/3LdRLxF>

1. If you imagine organized religion as your “boat in the storm,” how do you decide when the challenge of hanging on is worth the risk of letting go?
2. Consider Walt Whitman’s advice to “Re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul.” What beliefs have you found to be insulting to your soul? How do you feel about the author’s advice to, before discarding, “give them permission to exist, to sit beside you, to just be,” and then, if you find they have no further value for you, “Tell them thanks for sharing, but it’s time for them to move on now”?
3. In contrast to those things that insult your soul, what has “gladdened your soul and added beauty and wonder and joy to your life,” as the author says?
4. Is there anywhere you see God currently at work in your life or in the world? Are there small or ordinary things presently beckoning or calling you toward greater meaning, beauty, or wonder?
5. What is the difference between a God who works through relational power and one who works through unilateral power? Can you identify with a call from God that sounds like “Psst. You could do this. You could be this”?

## CHAPTER 3

“hmmm” the aim of god



### WATCH THE CHAPTER 3 COMPANION VIDEO

<http://bit.ly/3sPfXjx>

1. How do you feel about the idea that God has a plan for everything?
2. Have you ever looked to Jeremiah 29:11 as a promise for your own life? How does it change your perspective to read “plans” as “intentions” or “thoughts”?
3. If God’s intention and aim for the whole world is *shalom*, what would that look like in your own life? Is it a far-off, ultimate hope, or something you could experience every day? What is our role in helping God bring about *shalom*?
4. Do you agree with the Theodore Parker quote (often associated with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.) that the moral arc of the universe “bends toward justice”? If so, do you see that as the work of God?
5. What do you think of the assertion that seeking *shalom* is not just about the future, or even the present, but also involves how we look at the past?

## CHAPTER 4

### “sheesh” the nature of god



#### [WATCH THE CHAPTER 4 COMPANION VIDEO](http://bit.ly/3PrL8KD)

<http://bit.ly/3PrL8KD>

1. Do you resonate with the phrase “a leap of doubt”? How might it compare to a “leap of faith”?
2. Have you ever heard God spoken of as the Unmoved Mover or the Divine Watchmaker? Have you ever thought of God as powerful but unchanging?
3. How do you describe what is changing about God and what is unchanging?
4. The author discusses the Hebrew terms for God, *Adonai* and *Elohim*, one used when describing God’s intimate, earthy presence; and the other when speaking of God’s mighty, cosmic power. Do you have different names for God when thinking of different attributes of God?
5. Do you agree with the author’s claim that God internalizes or feels what we feel in such a way that our experience influences God’s experience?

## CHAPTER 5

“hum” the presence of god



**WATCH THE CHAPTER 5 COMPANION VIDEO**

<http://bit.ly/45FxYQ4>

1. When or where do you feel (or seek to feel) God’s presence? Is it more often in or outside of the church or other traditionally religious places?
2. As the author asks in this chapter, have you ever had an experience in which you found yourself deeply aware of something beautiful or powerful? Have you ever sensed that there might be a presence humming behind the veil of reality, something unmistakably real but not altogether reasonable or explainable?
3. What significance do you see in the fact that the Hebrew and Greek words for spirit are the same words as for breath and wind?
4. Do you see theological significance in the concept of Caesar’s Last Breath, or is it simply a scientific phenomenon? What does it mean to you?
5. Does the idea of God being in everyone, and everyone and everything being part of God make God seem more awe-inspiring or less to you? Does it change the way you think of God?

## CHAPTER 6

“bzzz” the glory of god



### WATCH THE CHAPTER 6 COMPANION VIDEO

<http://bit.ly/3PaoDsv>

1. What would you say gives life meaning?
2. Do you think science (or generally, knowing why certain things happen) makes God seem less mysterious? Is mystery inherent to God's wonder and glory?
3. The author suggests that Descartes's famous claim, "I think, therefore I am," has led to a modern worldview that values mind over matter and reason over belief. Do you see a distinction or conflict between human reason and divine revelation? In your view, are faith and reason compatible?
4. The author quotes Alfred North Whitehead in saying that God is "an occasion, an event of subjective experience." Do you find this definition meaningful?
5. What is your response to the ancient Greek puzzle of Theseus's ship? Do you agree with how the author says Jesus would respond—that it's not about the planks at all? How might you apply this riddle to life today?



## CHAPTER 7

“owh” the salvation of god



[WATCH THE CHAPTER 7 COMPANION VIDEO](http://bit.ly/44HpGWk)

<http://bit.ly/44HpGWk>

1. Have you ever been approached with the aggressive evangelism the author describes experiencing at a crusade event and in his college dorm? What was that experience like?
2. What do Jesus' life and teachings tell you about the false duality between the physical and the spiritual? What is the effect on our faith if we persistently spiritualize the promises of physical healing Jesus talks about?
3. The author says Jesus' vision for *shalom* had "limited success" in his lifetime. Do you agree? How successful would you say Jesus' vision has been over the past two thousand years?
4. Does the image of a lobster continually outgrowing its exoskeleton, doing the hard and vulnerable work of removing the old shell and growing a new one, resonate with your spiritual journey? How so?
5. Can you imagine reaching the "third birth" that the author describes, able to love one's enemy the way Will Campbell cared for the Klan members? How could you grow in that direction?

## CHAPTER 8

“poof” the end, with god



### WATCH THE CHAPTER 8 COMPANION VIDEO

<http://bit.ly/3RcPHtS>

1. What are your thoughts on how the world will end—fire, ice, expansion, contraction—or something else?
2. Why do you think Revelation’s violent vision of the end times, in which persecutors get what’s coming to them, is so much more popular with and well-known to modern Christians than prophetic imagery of God gathering all things together, lions laying down with lambs, etc.?
3. The author discusses *telic* and *atelic* activities. How does the way you spend your time break down across those categories? What are you doing that will last?
4. Why, when Jesus was asked about eternal life, did he talk about the things one does in this earthly life?
5. Is it hard for you to think about what might come after this life? How might the vision of “the age to come”—an age marked by *shalom* and everything God dreams for the world—change the way you think about God and life itself?